CONTEXTUAL AND MISSIONAL

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Introduction

Many evangelical churches still assume the presence of conservative, traditional people around who can simply be called to a decision in classic evangelistic venues. I don't think we simply need evangelistic churches, but 'missional' churches.

We need to admit upfront a problem with the word 'missional.' It has been used in sharply different ways and its meaning is under dispute. For our instructional purposes, however, I want to fill the word with our own denotation (as we have with the word 'religion' in the first talk) even though I know many others will use the term to convey different things.

Why use the term missional? An 'evangelistic church' ordinarily means a church that develops fervor and venues for evangelism. A 'missional' church (as we define it) gears absolutely every single part of its life – its worship, community, public discourse and preaching, education – for the presence of non-believers from the culture surrounding it. A missional church's congregation reflects the demographic make-up of the surrounding community – and therefore it gives non-Christian neighbours attractive and challenging glimpses of what they would look like as Christians. A missional church's worship is 'evangelistic' in the sense that it makes sense to non-believers in that culture, even while it challenges and shapes people with the gospel. A missional church's people are outwardly focused, so involved in the local community, and so alert for every opportunity to point people toward Christ, that evangelism happens naturally through relationships. Because of the attractiveness of its community, the contextual nature of its message, and humility of its people, a missional church will discover significant numbers of people always in its midst, 'incubating' and exploring Christianity. It must welcome them in hundreds of ways. It will do little to make them 'comfortable' but will do everything to make its gospel message understandable.

A. 'The Mission of the Church'

A very contested question is the relationship between evangelism and social concern within the mission of the church. There are basically four positions. **1)** The church's mission is to preach the Word, administer the sacraments, and do discipline in order to evangelise and disciple. Period. **2)** The church's mission is to do word as well as deed ministry – doing justice and serving the needy – but it grants a priority to evangelism/word ministry. **3)** The church's mission is to both do justice and preach grace without giving priority, integrating both together into a seamless cloth. **4)** The church's mission is not to dictate beliefs, but only to serve the good of society. Social concern is evangelism. Part of the tension inside the evangelical church stems from the fact is that <u>both</u> position #2 and #3 can be made very strongly.

POSITION #2 – HOLISTIC MISSION WITH PRIORITY TO EVANGELISM MINISTRY

Advocates of 'evangelism priority' point out that the world will always applaud our efforts to work with the poor and AIDS sufferers, but will be extremely hostile to evangelism, which is seen as 'arrogant' and imperialistic. Therefore, they reason, unless we prioritise evangelism, the church will slide into doing mainly social justice, since that is going the way of least resistance. Also, they point out, most of the explicit places where Jesus tells his disciples to 'go into the world' he speaks of preaching, evangelism, and discipling. On the surface, in the New Testament the commissions to the church seem to be all about the Word – baptizing and discipline.

Finally, they argue, in the final analysis, isn't it more important to save a soul for eternity than to improve his living conditions for a few years? 'What does it profit a person to gain the whole world and lose their soul?' The context of this statement in the gospels shows Jesus is talking about the possibility of eternal damnation. Having said all this, advocates of this approach add that Christians must nonetheless obey both the Great Commandment – to love our neighbour, Luke 10, the Good Samaritan – and the cultural mandate, to make God-honouring culture, Genesis 1-2, 'tending the garden.' Christians must obey the Great Commandment and the Cultural mandate, but the job of the church is the Great Commission (which they consider to be about evangelism/discipling only.)

POSITION #3 – HOLISTIC MISSION WITH SYMBIOTIC WORD-DEED MINISTRY

Advocates of a 'seamless cloth' approach point out that the missionary mandate to God's people in the Old Testament was to declare God's glory by being a new human society of justice and love (Deut 4:4-6.). Its obedience to God's law created a counter-culture that was to attract the nations. A major feature of this 'new humanity' included justice for the widow and the orphan, hospitality to aliens, and treating of the poor with equity. One major facet of being 'a light to the nations' was doing justice for the poor. In God's law – which is filled with 'social legislation' – God shows the world through his people the way he wants them to regard the economically and socially weak and needy.

Does this basic principle – of being a witness through the nature of the believing community – change in the New Testament? No. When Jesus, in his John 17 high priestly says that the loving community of disciples is a powerful apologetic for the truth of the gospel, he is simply reflecting the Old Testament principle. Peter says that as a 'holy nation' – a distinct, holy, human society – the church declares the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9-10.) Here Peter directly applies the commission of Israel to the church. By doing justice and creating a community of love, we back up the preaching of the gospel. In this view, the Great Commission is just the cultural mandate re-issued in a new situation. Jesus sent us into the world not only to evangelise but to disciple, and to disciple people to do all for the glory of God, to follow Christ not only in their private life, but their public life, is to send the church out into the world to work with Christian distinctiveness in vocations, to love our neighbour, to seek the peace of our city.

CAN THE OPPONENTS BE BOTH RIGHT?

It may be a sign of muddle-headedness on my part, but I've always felt that somehow both position #2 and #3 are both right. That doesn't seem as impossible to me now as it once did.

In the abstract – evangelism is more important than social justice, not because the soul is more important than the body, but the eternal is more important than the temporary. And though we know that there will be some continuity between this material world and next (just as there was some continuity between Jesus' pre- and post-resurrection body) nevertheless, ultimately, to save a soul is more important than to heal or feed a broken body. However, in practical reality – if you don't care for the needs of people, why will they listen to you? Yes, it is true that the world will applaud our service to the needy and grind their teeth at our evangelism. But if they see us only doing evangelism, they will conclude (perhaps rightly in some cases!) that we are only out to increase the size of our tribe and our power rather than to love people. Yes, in the abstract, if you have to choose between feeding a hungry person and evangelising him, you would evangelise him. But in what real life situation would you come into a person's presence and life and only talk to him, without doing loving deeds? The New Testament condemns this kind of 'abstraction' in 1 John 3:17-18.

The practical reality I have seen on the ground – and especially in cities – is that the more we do justice the more effective our evangelism will be. There are plenty of places that the Bible testifies to how 'seeing your good deeds' out in the world 'among the pagans' non-believers come to 'glorify God' (1 Peter 2:12; Matt 5:14-6). The symbiotic, whole-cloth relationship of word and deed ministry needs to be reflected on. Some say that doing justice is the result of the gospel. After they have been evangelised, believers will commit to love and social justice. But doing justice can precede evangelism. It creates plausibility for the gospel proclamation, and in reality it often draws non-believers in. Non-Christians are often deeply attracted to evangelical social justice ministries – they come and participate. This then leads them into Christian community and leads to a great openness to evangelism.

FIRST WAY FORWARD – A SYNTHESIS

So here's how #2 and #3 can actually both be right. Evangelism, in principle, is the most important ministry, but in practice it must always exist in an inseperable weave with deed ministry. In Luke 10 Jesus calls his disciples both to 'gospel-messaging' (urging everyone to believe the gospel) and to 'gospel-neighbouring' (sacrificially meeting the needs of those around them whether they believe or not!) The two absolutely go together. First, they go together theologically. The resurrection shows us that God not only created both body and spirit but will also redeem both body and spirit. The salvation Jesus will eventually bring in its fullness will include liberation from all the effects of sin – not only spiritual but physical and material as well. Jesus came both preaching the Word and healing and feeding. Secondly, they go together practically. We must be ever wary of collapsing evangelism into deed ministry as the Social Gospel did. But loving deeds are an irreplaceable witness to the power and nature of God's grace, an irreplaceable testimony to the truth of the gospel. In Jesus' ministry, healing the sick and feeding the hungry was inseparable from evangelism (John 9:1-7, 35-41.) His miracles were not simply naked displays of power designed to prove his supernatural status, but they were signs of the coming kingdom (Matt 11:2ff.)

So we see in the book of Acts, several times there is a very close connection made between economic sharing of possessions with those in need and the multiplication of converts through the preaching of the Word. We see this in Acts 2, where the descent of the Holy Spirit and an explosive growth in numbers (v.41) is connected to radical sharing with the needy (v.44-45.) In Acts 4 we have a recapitulation. After the filling of the Spirit the economic sharing of the people inside the church accompanied the preaching of the resurrection with great power (Acts 4:32-35.) Finally, in Acts 6, after the ministry of diakonia is more firmly established, Luke adds: 'so the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly' (v.7). Luke is again pointing out the extremely close connection between deed-ministry and word-ministry. The word 'so' at the beginning of v.7 shows that the numerical growth – the evangelistic effectiveness – of the church was given a huge boost by the ministry to the poor widows. The practical actions of Christians for people in need demonstrated the truth and power of the gospel. Acts of mercy and justice are visible to non-believers and can lead men to glorify God (Matt 5:13-16.)

> 'Nothing has contributed to the progress of the superstition of the Christians as their charity to strangers… the impious Galileans provide not only for their own poor, but for ours as well'
>
> Julian the Apostate, Roman emperor

Note: What do we mean 'inseparable'? Ministry to the poor may precede the sharing of the gospel as in Jesus' ministry to the blind man. Though the deed ministry led to the blind man's spiritual illumination, there is no indication that Jesus gave the aid conditionally. He did not press him to believe as he healed him – he just told him to 'go and wash' (John 9:7.) Even so when Jesus spoke of giving money and clothing to those that ask, he insisted that we should give without expecting anything in return. (Luke 6:32-35.) We should not give aid only because the person is open to the gospel nor should we withdraw it if he or she does not become spiritually receptive.

However, it should always be clear that the motivation for our aid is our Christian faith, and pains should be taken to find non-artificial and non-exploitative ways to keep ministries of the Word and gatherings for teaching and fellowship closely connected to ministries of aid.

SECOND WAY FORWARD – A DISTINCTION

We laid this out in the 'Church and Culture' paper – but here is a recap.

The church's gospel ministry includes both evangelising non-believers and shaping every area of believers' lives with the gospel, but that doesn't mean that the church as an institution under its elders is to corporately carry out all the activity that we equip our members to do. Abraham Kuyper's 'sphere sovereignty' can be of some help here. The Dutch Christian leader taught that the 'institutional church' was the church in the world, as organised under its officers and ministers, preaching the gospel, baptising and making disciples. This he distinguished from the church as 'organism,' by which he meant Christians in the world, who have been discipled and equipped to bring the gospel to bear on all of life. Sometimes we talk about the gathered (institutional) church and dispersed believers. But Kuyper does not think of Christians out in the world as merely discrete and detached individuals. They are to think and work together, banding together in all kinds of creative forms. Through non-profits, agencies, foundations, political action groups, and so on – they are being the church (organic) in the world that the institutional church discipled them to be. Kuyper insists that the church *qua* church is to preach the gospel (evangelise and disciple,) worship and observe the sacraments, and engage in church discipline. In these activities it is producing members who will engage in art, science, education, journalism, film-making, business, and so on. But the church itself should not run film production companies, own and operate major businesses, etc.

With this in mind, the church's ministry to the poor makes great sense as a corporate vehicle for Christians to fulfill their Biblical duty to the poor, as a corporate witness to the community of Christ's transforming love, and as an important 'plausibility structure' for the preaching of the gospel. However, the church should recognise different 'levels' of ministry to the poor and should know its limits. First, there is **relief**, direct aid to meet physical/material/social needs. Second, there is **development**, what is needed is to bring a person or community to self-sufficiency. 'Development' for an individual includes education, job creation and training. But development for a neighbourhood or community means re-investing social and financial capital into a social system – housing development and home ownership, other capital investments, and so on. Finally, there is **reform**. Social reform moves beyond relief of immediate needs and dependency and seeks to change social conditions and structures which aggravate or cause that dependency. This means that Christians should also work for a particular community to get better police protection, more just and fair banking practices, zoning practices, better laws.

As a general rule, I believe the institutional church should be involved in the first of these (and some of the second), but voluntary associations, organisations, and ministries should be organised to do the second and the third. Why? Many would argue that the second and third levels are too expensive and would take away financial resources from the ministry of the Word. Others say they are too political and would require that the congregation be too allied with particular civil magistrates and political parties in ways that would compromise the church in various ways. Others say that the second and third levels are too complex and it is not within the skill-set or mandate of the elders of the church to manage them. Their job is the ministry of the Word of God and prayer (Acts 6:1-7.) All of these arguments have some merit but would need to be nuanced and worked out in order to do justice to my thesis. I cannot here give that process the time and space it would require. I would only observe that most of the churches in the U.S. who are deeply involved in caring for the poor have found it wisest to spin off non-profit corporations to do community development and reform of social structures, rather than seek to do them directly through the local congregation, under the elders.

B. The 'Missional Church'

The Need for a 'Missional' Church In the West the relationship of (Anglo-European) Christian churches to the broader culture was a relationship known as 'Christendom.' The institutions of society 'Christianised' people, and stigmatised non-Christian belief and behaviour. Though people were 'Christianised' by the culture, they were not regenerated or converted with the Gospel. The church's job was then to challenge persons into a vital, living relation with Christ. There were great advantages and yet great disadvantages to 'Christendom.'

The advantage was that there was a common language for public moral discourse with which society could discuss what was 'the good.' The disadvantage was that Christian morality without gospel-changed hearts often led to cruelty and hypocrisy. Think of how the small town in 'Christendom' treated the unwed mother or the gay person. Also, under 'Christendom' the church often was silent against abuses of power of the ruling classes over the weak. For these reasons and others, the church in Europe and North America has been losing its privileged place as the arbiter of public morality since at least the mid 19th century. The decline of Christendom has accelerated greatly since the end of WWII.

The British missionary Leslie Newbigin went to India around 1950. There he was involved with a church living 'in mission' in a very non-Christian culture. When he returned to England some 30 years later, he discovered that now the Western church too existed in a non-Christian society, but it had not adapted to its new situation. Though public institutions and popular culture of Europe and North America no longer 'Christianised' people, the church still ran its ministries assuming that a stream of 'Christianised', traditional/moral people would simply show up in services. Some churches certainly did 'evangelism' as one ministry among many. But the church in the West had not become completely 'missional', adapting and reformulating absolutely everything it did in worship, discipleship, community, and service, so as to be engaged with the non-Christian society around it. It had not developed a 'missiology of western culture' the way it had done so for other non-believing cultures.

One of the reasons much of the American evangelical church has not experienced the same precipitous decline as the Protestant churches of Europe and Canada is because in the U.S. there is still a 'heartland' with the remnants of the old 'Christendom' society. There the informal public culture (though not the formal public institutions) still stigmatises non-Christian beliefs and behaviour. 'There is a fundamental schism in American cultural, political, and economic life. There's the quicker-growing, economically vibrant, morally relativist, urban-oriented, culturally adventuresome, sexually polymorphous, and ethnically diverse nation... and there's the small town, nuclear family, religiously-oriented, white-centric other America, [with]... its diminishing cultural and economic force... [T]wo nations...' Michael Wolfe, New York, Fee 26 2001, p. 19. In conservative regions, it is still possible to see people profess faith and the church grow without becoming 'missional.' Most traditional evangelical churches still can only win people to Christ who are temperamentally traditional and conservative. But, as Wolff notes, this is a 'shrinking market.' And eventually evangelical churches ensconced in the declining, remaining enclaves of 'Christendom' will have to learn how to become 'missional'. If it does not do that it will decline or die. We don't simply need evangelistic churches, but rather 'missional' churches.

THE ELEMENTS OF A MISSIONAL CHURCH

1. **Discourse in the vernacular**. In 'Christendom' there is little difference between the language inside and outside of the church. Documents of the early U.S. Congress, for example, are riddled with allusions to and references from the Bible. Biblical technical terms are well-known inside and outside. In a missional church, however, terms must be explained. **a)** The missional church avoids 'tribal' language, stylized prayer language, unnecessary evangelical pious 'jargon', and archaic language that seeks to set a 'spiritual tone.' **b)** The missional church avoids 'we – them' language, disdainful jokes that mock people of different politics and beliefs, and dismissive, disrespectful comments about those who differ with us. **c)** The missional church avoids sentimental, pompous, 'inspirational' talk. Instead we engage the culture with gentle, self-deprecating but joyful irony the gospel creates. Humility + joy = gospel irony and realism. **d)** The missional church avoids ever talking as if non-believing people are not present. If you speak and discourse as if your whole neighbourhood is present (not just scattered Christians), eventually more and more of your neighbourhood will find their way in or be invited. **e)** Unless all of the above is the outflow of a truly humble-bold gospel-changed heart, it is all just 'marketing' and 'spin.'

2. **Enter and re-tell the culture's stories with the gospel.** In 'Christendom' it is possible to simply exhort Christianised people to 'do what they know they should.' There is little or no real engagement, listening, or persuasion. It is more a matter of exhortation (and often, heavy reliance on guilt.) In a missional church preaching and communication should always assume the presence of skeptical people, and should engage their stories, not simply talk about 'old times.' **a)** To 'enter' means to show sympathy toward and deep acquaintance with the literature, music, theatre, etc. of the existing culture's hopes, dreams, 'heroic' narratives, fears. **b)** The older culture's story was, to be a good person, a good father/mother, son/daughter, to live a decent, merciful, good life. **c)** Now the culture's story is a) to be free and self-created and authentic (theme of freedom from oppression), and b) to make the world safe for everyone else to be the same (theme of inclusion of the 'other'; justice). **d)** To 're-tell' means to show how only in Christ can we have freedom without slavery and embracing of the 'other' without injustice.

3. **Theologically train lay people for public life and vocation.** In 'Christendom' you can afford to train people just in prayer, Bible study, evangelism-private world skills, because they are not facing radically non-Christian values in their public life, where they work, in

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their neighbourhood, etc. In a 'missional' church, the laity needs theological education to 'think Christianly' about everything and work with Christian distinctiveness. They need to know: **a)** what cultural practices are common grace and to be embraced, **b)** what practices are antithetical to the gospel and must be rejected, **c)** what practices can be adapted/revised. In a 'missional' situation, lay people renewing and transforming the culture through distinctively Christian vocations must be lifted up as real 'kingdom work' and ministry along with the traditional ministry of the Word. Finally, Christians will have to use the gospel to demonstrate true, Biblical love and 'tolerance' in 'the public square' toward those with whom we deeply differ. This tolerance should equal or exceed that which opposing views show toward Christians. The charge of intolerance is perhaps the main 'defeater' of the gospel in the non-Christian west.

4. **Create Christian community that is counter-cultural and counter-intuitive.** In Christendom, 'fellowship' is basically just a set of nurturing relationships, support and accountability. That is necessary, of course. In a missional church, however, Christian community must go beyond that to embody a 'counter-culture,' showing the world how radically different a Christian society is with regard to sex, money, and power. **a)** In sex. We avoid both the secular society's idolisation of sex and traditional society's fear of sex. We also exhibit love rather than hostility or fear toward those whose sexual life-patterns are different. **b)** In money. We promote a radically generous commitment of time, money, relationships, and living space to social justice and the needs of the poor, the immigrant, the economically and physically weak. **c)** In power. We are committed to power-sharing and relationship-building between races and classes that are alienated outside of the Body of Christ. In general, a church must be more deeply and practically committed to deeds of compassion and social justice than traditional liberal churches and more deeply and practically committed to evangelism and conversion than traditional fundamentalist churches. This kind of church is profoundly 'counter-intuitive' to American observers. It breaks their ability to categorise (and dismiss) it as liberal or conservative. Only this kind of church has any chance in the non-Christian west.

5. **Practice Christian unity as much as possible on the local level.** In Christendom, when 'everyone was a Christian' it was necessary (perhaps) for a church to define itself over against other churches. That is, to get an identity you had to say, 'we are not like that church over there, or those Christians over here.' Today, however, it is much more illuminating and helpful for a church to define itself over against 'the world', the values of the non-Christian culture. It is very important that we not spend our time bashing and criticising other kinds of churches. That simply plays in to the common 'defeater' that Christians are all intolerant. While we have to align ourselves in denominations that share many of our distinctives, at the local level we should cooperate and reach out to and support the other congregations and churches in our local area. This will raise many thorny issues, of course, but our bias should be in the direction of cooperation.

Case Study

Let me show you how this goes beyond any 'program.' These are elements that have to be present in every area of the church. So, for example, what makes a small group 'missional'? A 'missional' small group is not necessarily one which is doing some kind of specific 'evangelism' program (though that is to be recommended) Rather, 1) if its members love and talk positively about the city/neighbourhood, 2) if they speak in language that is not filled with pious tribal or technical terms and phrases, nor disdainful and embattled language, 3) if in their Bible study they apply the gospel to the core concerns and stories of the people of the culture, 4) if they are obviously interested in and engaged with the literature and art and thought of the surrounding culture and can discuss it both appreciatively and yet critically, 5) if they exhibit deep concern for the poor and generosity with their money and purity and respect with regard to the opposite sex, and show humility toward people of other races and cultures, 6) they do not bash other Christians and churches – then seekers and non-believing people from the city A) will be invited and B) will come and will stay as they explore spiritual issues. If these marks are not there it will only be able to include believers or traditional, 'Christianised' people.

C. Evangelism in a Missional Church

1. **The new situation.** It is not my job to look at the 'modern vs postmodern' distinction in any detail, but I think most would agree it means at least these things. First, there's a truth problem. All claims of truth are seen as constraints aimed to siphon power off toward the claimer. Second, there's the guilt problem. In the modern era, in which Freud reigned, guilt, though seen as mainly a neurosis, was still considered a problem. Almost all the older gospel presentations assume an easily accessed sense of guilt and moral short-coming in the listener. But today that is increasingly absent. Third, there's now a meaning problem. Today there's enormous skepticism that texts and words can get meaning across. We may say, 'here's a Biblical text and it says this.' But the response is: 'Who's to say that is the right interpretation? Textual meanings are unstable.'

2. **The process.** Evangelism in a postmodern context must be much more thorough, progressive, and process-oriented. There are many stages to bring people through who know nothing at all about the gospel and

Christianity. At the risk of over-simplification, I'll lay out four stages that people have to go through to come from complete ignorance of the gospel and Christianity to full embrace. I'll call them: 1) intelligibility, 2) credibility, 3) plausibility and 4) intimacy. By 'intimacy' I mean leading someone to a personal commitment. The problem with virtually all modern evangelism programs is that they assume listeners come from a Christianised background and so they very lightly summarise the gospel (jumping through stages one through three often in minutes) and go right to stage 'intimacy.' But that won't do any more.

a. **'Intelligibility'** means to perceive clearly, and I use this word to refer to what Don Carson calls 'world-view evangelism.' In his essay in Telling the Truth, Don analyses Paul's discourse at Athens in Acts 17. Paul spends nearly the whole time on God and his sovereignty, on a God-centred philosophy of history, and other basic planks in a Biblical view of reality. He mentions Jesus only briefly and then only speaks of his resurrection. Many people consider this a failure to preach the gospel. They believe that every time you preach you must tell people they are sinners, going to hell, that Jesus died on the cross for them and they need to repent and believe in him. The problem with this is that until people's minds and world-views have been prepared, they hear you say 'sin' and 'grace' and even 'God' and they hear it in terms of their own categories. By going too quickly to this overview you guarantee that they will misunderstand what you are saying. In the early days of Redeemer I saw a number of people make decisions for Christ, but in a couple of years, when some desirable sexual partners came along, they simply bailed out of the faith. I was stunned. Then I realised that in our Manhattan culture people believed that truth was simply 'what works for me.' There is no concept of a truth (outside the empirical realm) that is a reality that is there no matter what I feel or think. When I taught them that Jesus was the Truth they had understood it through their own categories. There hadn't really been a power-encounter at the world-view level. They hadn't really changed their world-view furniture. When Jesus didn't 'work' for them he was no longer their Truth.

b. **'Credibility'** is the area of 'defeaters'. A defeater is a widely held belief that most people consider common sense which contradicts some basic Christian teaching. A defeater is 'Belief A' that, since it is true means Christian belief B just can't be true on the face of it. An example of a defeater belief now is: 'I just can't believe there is only one true religion, one way to God.' Notice that is not an argument, it's just an assertion. There is almost no evidence you can muster for the statement. It is really an emotional expression but it is so widely held and deeply felt that for many – even most people – it automatically means orthodox Christianity can't be true. Now in the older western culture there were very few defeater beliefs out there. The great majority of people believed the Bible, believed in God and heaven and hell, and so on. In the old Evangelism Explosion training I remember there was an appendix of 'Objections' but you were directed not to bring these up unless the person you were talking to brought them up. You were to get through the presentation. But today you must have a good list of the 10-20 basic defeaters out there and must speak to them constantly in all your communication and preaching. You have to go after them and show people that all their doubts about Christianity are really themselves alternate faith-assertions. You have to show them what they are and ask them for as much warrant and support for them that they are asking Christians for theirs. For example, you must show someone who says: 'I think all religions are equally valid; no one's view of spiritual reality is superior to anyone else's,' that that statement is itself a faith assertion (it can't be proven) and is itself a view on spiritual reality that he or she thinks is superior to the orthodox Christian view. So the speaker is doing the very thing he is forbidding to others. That's not fair! That sort of approach is called 'pressuppositional apologetics.' It uncovers the faith-assumptions that skeptics smuggle in to their doubts. It will make them begin to think. If you don't do this, people's eyes will just glaze over as you speak. They will tune you out, nothing you say will sound plausible to them. You can tell them they are sinners and say 'the Bible says' but the defeater belief may be deeply embedded in your listeners that the Bible was written by the winners of a power-battle with the Gnostic gospel writers and so all you say is in-credible.

c. **'Plausibility'**. In 'Intelligibility' and 'Credibility' you are showing listeners the non-negotiables and angularities of the faith, the truth-claims they have to deal with. But in 'plausibility' you enter deeply into their own hopes, beliefs, aspirations, and longings and you try to connect with them. This is 'contextualisation' and that makes people very nervous in many circles. To some people it sounds like giving people what they want to hear. But contextualisation is showing people how the lines of their own lives, the hopes of their own hearts, and the struggles of their own cultures will be resolved in Jesus Christ. David Wells says:

Contextualisation is not merely a practical application of biblical doctrine but a translation of that doctrine into a conceptuality that meshes with

the reality of the social structures and patterns of life dominant in our contemporary life. Contextualisation is the process through which we find answer to the questions – where is the line between involvement and disengagement, acceptance and denial, continuity and discontinuity, being 'in' the world and not 'of' the world. Word of God must be restated to our own context… the preservation of its identity [that's intelligibility and credibility] is necessary for Christian belief; its contemporary relevance [that's plausibility] is required if Christians are to be believable.[1]

Here's an example. When I talk to someone who insists that 'no one's view on spiritual reality (faith) is superior to others' I always respond that that is a view of spiritual reality and a claim that the world would be a better place if others adopted it. Everyone has 'exclusive' views unavoidably. To insist no one should make a truth-claim is a truth-claim. So the real question is not 'do you think you have the truth?' (Everybody does.) The real question is: which set of exclusive truth-claims will lead to a humble, peaceful, non-superior attitude toward people with whom you deeply differ? At the centre of the Christian truth claim is a man on a cross, dying for his enemies, praying for their forgiveness. Anyone who thinks out the implications of that will be led to love and respect even their opponents.

What am I doing in the above paragraph? I'm taking a major theme of my secular culture, namely, that we live in a pluralistic society of conflict and diversity and we need resources for living at peace with one another. I'm arguing that the claim of religious relativism isn't a solution, because it is an exclusive claim to superiority masking itself as something else. Instead I am pointing out that Jesus dying on the cross best fulfills my pluralistic culture's yearning for peace and respect between people of different faiths. I'm contextualising, showing the gospel's plausibility in terms my culture can understand. We have to do this today. Of course there is always a danger of over-contextualising, but (as David Wells indicates in his quote) there is an equal danger of under-contextualisation. If you over-adapt, you may buy in to the idols of the new culture. But if you under-adapt you may be buying in to the idols of the older culture. If you are afraid to adapt somewhat to an over-experiential culture you may be too attached to an over-rational culture. So you have to think it out! To stand pat is no way to stay safe and doctrinally sound. You have to think it out.

3. **The context** Here I need only chime in with those (such as Tim Chester and Steve Timmis) who point out that it is in community that this evangelistic process really occurs. In traditional churches, baptised infants were then catechised and admitted to the Lord's Supper – it was a communal, gradual process. Even in non-liturgical churches, this communal-setting for evangelistic and discipleship process must be provided. Think of the membership of Lydia's house-church in Philippi in Acts 16. The three converts in the chapter mean it embraced different races (Lydia was Asian, the slave-girl was likely Greek, the Jailer was Roman), different economic classes (Lydia was white-collar, the slave-girl was poor, the Jailer was working-class), different cognitive styles (Lydia was rational, the slave-girl was intuitive, the Jailer was concrete-relational). The gospel leads them to embrace one another – they are 'brethren' (Acts 16:40).

One of the main problems that post-modern people have with both modern and traditional world-views (and Christianity is seen as falling within one or the other) is the way in which they exclude. If you have 'the truth' or 'the universals', that excludes and divides. But as Newbiggin shows, 'relativism' is as exclusive in its claims, and in the end can be a warrant for worse oppression than the modern and traditional. Christians must communicate and demonstrate that the gospel is different. Jesus says that's a sign of gospel-faith: Matthew 5: 47. If you only greet your brothers, what do you do more than others? Since the Jewish greeting was Shalom! and an embrace, Jesus is saying much. We must show our uniqueness by following our Lord who always embraced the moral and spiritual outsider. Matt.21:31 'The prostitutes and the tax collectors are entering the kingdom of God before you. If you understand the gospel of grace you treat the 'other': a) With respect. Grace means the non-believer may be a better person. b) With courage. Grace means the non-believer's possible rejection of us is not so fearsome. c) With hope. Grace means you are a miracle and no one is beyond hope. No other world-view can produce this combination of humility and confidence, this kind of community, in which the bonds between believers across racial/cultural/and class lines are strong, and in which the insiders love and respect those outside.

D. Contextualisation

INTRODUCTION

One part of becoming 'missional' is contextualisation. Contextualisation 'incarnates' the gospel into a new culture. It is the process by which we present the gospel to people of a particular world-view, in forms that the hearers can understand. It is adapting gospel ministry from one culture into another culture without compromising the gospel. True contextualisation, then, is concerned to both challenge the culture and to connect

[1] David Wells, 'The Painful Transition from Theoria to Praxis'.

and to adapt to it, for if we fail to do either, we obscure and lose the gospel, either by identifying it too much with the new culture or by identifying it too much with the older one. Contextualisation is not 'giving people what they want' but rather it is giving God's answers (which they may not want!) to questions they are asking and in forms that they can comprehend. Everything about a church must be contextualised – its message, its discourse, its approach to decision-making, its leadership approaches, its worship, its use of the arts, its outreach, its instructional methods, its preaching.

1. THE IMPORTANCE AND UNAVOIDABILITY OF A CONTEXTUALIZED GOSPEL.

Contextualisation is the incarnation of the gospel in a new culture. Each culture has a world-view or 'world story' at its heart. To reach a new culture the gospel must enters, challenges, and retells the story of the new culture. There are then two equal and opposite errors that can be made.

- If the culture is not truly entered (that is, if the gospel communication comes in the undiluted cultural-form of its sender,) then the receptors will have a 'cultural conversion.' They do not actually encounter God, but simply adopt the culture of the sender.
- If, on the other hand, the culture is not truly challenged and re-worked (that is, if the basic idol(s) of the culture are not really removed,) then the receptors also have only a 'cultural conversion.' They simply get a lightly 'Christianised' version of their own culture!
- Every expression and embodiment of Christianity is contextualised. There is no such thing as a universal, a-historical expression of Christianity. Jesus didn't come to earth as a generalized being – by becoming human he had to become a particular human. He was male, Jewish, working-class. If he was to be human had to come socially and culturally-situated person.
  - ⇒ So the minute we begin to minister we must 'incarnate', even as Jesus did. Actual Christian practices must have both a Biblical form or shape as well as a cultural form or shape. For example, the Bible clearly directs us to use music to praise God – but as soon as we choose a music to use we enter a culture. As soon as we choose a language, as soon as we choose a vocabulary, as soon as we choose a particular level of emotional expressiveness and intensity, as soon as we choose even an illustration as an example for a sermon – we are moving toward the social context of some people and away from the social context of others. At Pentecost, everyone heard the sermon in his or her own language and dialect. But since Pentecost, we can never be 'all things to all people' at the very same time. So adaptation to culture is inevitable.
  - ⇒ This is not relativism! 'No truth which human beings may articulate can ever be articulated in a culture-transcending way – but that does not mean that the truth thus articulated does not transcend culture.' (D.A.Carson) It is important to keep the balance of this statement! If you forget the first half you'll think there is only one true way to communicate the gospel. If you forget the second half you'll lose your grip on the fact that nonetheless there is only one true gospel. Either way you will be ineffective in ministry. Paul does not change the gospel – but he adapts it very heavily. Sure this opens the door to abuses, but to fear and refuse to adapt to culture opens to abuses of gospel just as much! The balance is to not, on one hand succumb to relativism nor, on the other hand, think contextualisation is really avoidable. Both are gospel-eroding errors.

Summary:

- If we over-adapt to a culture we are trying to reach, it means we have bought in to that culture's idols. We are allowing that culture too much authority. For example, we may take a good theme (e.g. 'the freedom of the individual' in the West – which fits with the 'priesthood of all believers') and allow it to be an idol (e.g. 'individualism' so our church can't do pastoral accountability and discipline).
- If, on the other hand we under-adapt to a culture, it means we have accepted our own culture's idols. We are forgetting that our own version of Christianity is in large part not Biblical but simply cultural.
- To the degree a ministry is over or under adapted, it loses culture-transforming power. It is therefore impossible to avoid the very real dangers of contextualisation by simply holding on to the old, familiar ways. That would be as much of a cultural trap as to over-adapt.

2. THE 'MIXED NATURE' OF CULTURE.

All cultures are 'mixed' – that is all cultures are complex and they interweave godly and ungodly elements together very closely. This is the case because a) all human beings are both radically fallen yet made in the image and likeness of God, and because b) of varying degrees of natural and special revelation that may be present within them. Even in cultures where the Bible is influential, the depravity of human nature creates idols which reign within. And on the other hand, cultures with little or no influence from the Bible may still (depending on the level of God's common grace) contain many strong elements, for God gives people a knowledge of moral truth in their consciences (Romans 2). Therefore, every culture to some degree will reflect the knowledge of God that every person possesses, even if it is suppressed (Romans 1). Yet every culture to some degree will be distorted by sin, namely the elevation of finite values to the position of the absolute (idolatry). Therefore we can't simply evaluate more traditional, conservative cultures as being more 'Biblical' and liberal, secular cultures as being more immoral and evil. Conservative cultures often elevate the family or one's race to an absolute value – leading to the idolatries of racism, tribalism, patriarchy and other forms of

moralism and oppression. Liberal cultures elevate the individual and human freedom to an absolute value – leading to the erosion of family, community, of integrity in both business and sexual practices. Yet the both the importance of the family and the worth and freedom of the individual are rooted in a Biblical world-view. So both the 'collectivist' traditional culture and the 'individualist' liberal culture are mixtures of darkness and light.

This is quite important for Christians to realise. Christians' reaction to culture is too simplistic and doesn't do analysis that goes beneath the behavioural level. They simply see contemporary culture as 'bad' and the more traditional culture as better. But –

- First, this comes from a theologically 'thin' view of sin, which sees sin as a series of discrete acts of non-compliance to God's regulations. Christian growth is seen mainly as seeking environments where you are less likely to do these sinful actions. Sin is something that can be essentially removed from the person. (This view of sin comports with a lack of understanding of the thoroughness and richness of Christ's gracious work for us. If we have to earn our salvation, we need a view of sin that is easier to deal with by conscious effort.) But a theologically 'thick' view of sin sees it as a compulsive drive of the heart to produce or discover idols.
  - ⇒ If we have a 'thin' view of sin, we will remove from our view anything that could tempt us to do overt actions of sexual immorality, profanity, violence. By withdrawing such cultural 'texts' from our view we may feel less sinful, but that is not the case. The complex organic nature of our sin will still be at work making idols out of things that are not overt forms of law-breaking – like our moral goodness, or financial security, or our family, or doctrinal purity, or pride in our own traditional culture, and so on. In fact, too much emphasis on 'withdrawal' makes the likelihood of slipping into 'respectable' idolatries greater.
  - ⇒ If, instead, we have the 'thick' view of sin – as idolatry that pervades all we do – should lead not to withdrawal or to uncritical consumption, but rather to 'humble, critical engagement.' We should identify cultural idolatries in popular culture as ways of repenting for the seeds of the same in our own hearts and avoiding them. (There is certainly room for specific withdrawal form some texts of popular – or 'high'! – culture, especially when we are younger. We are talking here of blanket withdrawal or uncritical consumption.
- Second, this comes from a theologically 'thin' view of 'common grace' or what is sometimes called 'general' or 'natural' revelation. As we noted above, Christians have long recognised that all people have 'knowledge' of God that they suppress, according to Romans 1-2. But many conceive of this knowledge mainly (or strictly) as cognitive information that can be retrieved somehow as we argue with people about the existence of God, the truth of Christianity, and so on. In other words, innate knowledge of God is thought of in intellectualistic terms.
- The language of Rom 1:18-25 gives us a much more comprehensive and dynamic picture of how 'general revelation' or 'common grace' works in lives. The 'truth' is being 'suppressed' (v.18) but it continues to bear down on us. The NIV translation of verse 20: 'Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities… have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so men are without excuse.' But the verbs nosumena ('are being understood') and kathopatai ('are being seen') are in the form of present passive participles. That is, the reality of God's nature and our obligations to him are continuously present to us. It should not be thought of as static, innate ideas or information, but as a continually fresh, insistent pressure on the consciousness of every human being. In short, every artefact of human culture is a response to God's general revelation (cf. Isaiah 28 above) but always marred by an idolatrous heart that doesn't want to acknowledge the total sovereignty of God (Rom 1:21.) So all cultural production of a dialogue between God's general revelational grace and the idolatrous nature of the human heart.

> Loss of faith in a given religion does not by any means imply the eradication of the religious instinct. It merely means that the instinct, temporarily repressed, will seek an object elsewhere.
>
> – R. C. Zaehner, Oxford University, 1959[2]

In short, every human being producing culture (and everyone is!) is in a deep 'dialogue' with the general revelation of God. Therefore human culture is an extremely complex mixture of brilliant truth, marred half-truths, and overt resistance to the truth. We should be willing to be very engaged with general human culture produced by non-Christians. Why?

- First, a 'thick' view of sin means that even overtly Christian-produced culture will always have some idolatrous discourse within it. When we become Christians we continue to have powerful amounts of remaining sin in us. We continually struggle with remaining idolatrous impulses. Our 'Christian-cultural production' will not be free from these.
- Second, a 'thick' view of grace means that even overtly non-Christian-produced culture will always have some witness to God's truth in it. Even the angry, overtly anti-God culture is to a degree a testimony to God's reality. Many of these have an air of desperation about them. They are vainly trying to 'put out' what they know in

[2] Quoted as the epigraph in Turner, Hungry for Heaven.

their hearts.

So Christians are never as good as their 'right beliefs' should make them and non-Christians are never as bad as their 'wrong beliefs' should make them. In general, then, this means a stance of critical enjoyment of human culture. **Conclusion**: We should not espouse either an **a) 'Absolutist' view** – Cultural forms are either pure (because the commanding truths of that culture are based on good theology) or impure (because the commanding truths are based on bad theology). Therefore every cultural product can be evaluated as acceptable or un-acceptable. Or **b) 'Relativist' view** – Cultural forms are neutral and relative because the ultimate commanding truths of any culture are all relative and arbitrary. There is no absolute truth. A Biblical understanding of the gospel (Christians are saved but sinners) of the image of God (people are lost but indelibly reflect the nature of God) and of common grace (all people suppress the truth about God but they nonetheless 'hear' and 'know' it) – creates a much more nuanced understanding of culture. Cultures are mixed and each has valuable elements and demonic elements.

3. THE GOSPEL AND CONTEXTUALISATION.

- Religion (I obey – therefore I am accepted) leads to either pride (if I am living up to standards) or inferiority (if I am failing to live up to standards) but the gospel (I am accepted through Christ – therefore I obey) makes us both humble and confident at once.
- This makes us contextualisers! If we need the approval of the receiving culture too much, it shows a lack of gospel confidence. If we need the trappings of our own culture too much, it shows a lack of gospel humility. Gospel humility directs us to neither hate tradition nor be bound to it. It is proud to imagine that other Christians did not find much grace in past 'contextualisations' and therefore we do not ignore tradition. But it is also proud to think that new cultural trends have no grace in them and that former cultures were all more spiritually pure.

'Thus [those] who are not secure in Christ cast about for spiritual life preservers with which to support their confidence, and in their frantic search they not only cling to the shreds of ability and righteousness they find in themselves, but they fix upon their race, their membership in a party, their familiar social and ecclesiastical patterns, and their culture as means of self-recommendation. The culture is put on as if it were armour against self-doubt, but it becomes a mental straightjacket which cleaves to the flesh and can never be removed except through comprehensive faith in the saving work of Christ. Once faith is exercised, a Christian is free to be enculturated, to wear his culture like a comfortable suit of clothes. He can shift to other cultural clothing temporarily if he wishes to do so, as Paul suggests in 1 Cor.9:19-23, and he is released to admire and appreciate the differing expressions of Christ shining out through other cultures.[3]

3. PAUL'S 'CONTEXTUALISATION' OF THE GOSPEL

a. Though Paul is adamant in Galatians 1 that there is only one true gospel, in Galatians 2:7 he speaks of being entrusted with 'the gospel for the uncircumcised' while other apostles are given 'the gospel for the circumcised.' Older liberal commentators used this terminology to argue that there were several different gospels – there was not one set of standard gospel content. (This doesn't square at all with Paul's vehement protest to the contrary in Galatians 1:6-9.) Yet some conservatives have gone to the opposite extreme and seen in these terms nothing more than taking the very same message – in form and content – to two different audience. Leon Morris, Donald Guthrie, and others strike what is a good medium. Morris, who translates the term 'the gospel of the uncircumcision' and says in his commentary on Galatians 2:7 – 'What Paul means here is that [the gospel] is presented in one way to those who were circumcised and in another to those who were not.' There is only one gospel, of course, but it must be presented in different ways to different audiences.

b. How do we know Morris is right? The proof is in the pudding, as it were – in the book of Acts. Here we see what have to be considered pretty drastic differences in gospel presentation, depending on the audience and culture. Even Jay Adams, a rather rock-ribbed conservative in most issues, wrote a book Audience Adaptations in the Sermons and Speeches of Paul. In Acts 13:16ff. we see Paul sharing the gospel in a synagogue to those who believed in the God of the Bible, and in Acts 14:14-17 we see him sharing the gospel to a pagan, blue-collar crowd. The differences and similarities are striking.

1. The differences:

- His citation of authority very different. In the first case he quotes Scripture and John the Baptist. In the second, he argues from general revelation – greatness of creation.
- His content is different in emphasis. With Jews and God-fearers he ignores doctrine of God and gets right to Christ; with pagans here and Acts 17, he labours the very concept of God and either gets to Christ obliquely or doesn't get there at all.
- His final appeal is different in form – how to 'close' with Christ – is different.
- 13:39 Paul speaks of the law of God to the Jews and God-fearers and says, essentially: 'you think you are good, but you aren't good enough! You need Christ to justify you.'
- But in chapter 14 Paul he tells them to turn from 'worthless things' – idols – 'to the living God' who he says is the real source of 'joy' – he, not material things – is the real source. So he is saying, in effect: 'you think you are free – but you are not! You are

[3] Richard Lovelace, The Dynamics of Spiritual Life (IVP, 1979) p.190-191,198

enslaved to dead idols.'

2. Despite all these very profound differences, there are many commonalities.
   - Both audiences are told about a God both powerful yet good. (13:16-22; 14:17)
   - Both are told they are trying to save themselves in a wrong way (moral people by trying to obey the law 13:39 and pagans by giving themselves to idols and gods that cannot satisfy 14:15), and
   - Both are told not to turn to some scheme of performance, but that God has broken in to history now to accomplish our salvation. Even the speech of chapter 14, which was a spontaneous outburst, though it doesn't mention Christ directly, still points to the fact that salvation is something accomplished by God for us in history, not something we do.

c. Perhaps the most important text on the subject of 'contextualisation' is 1 Cor 1:22-25. There Paul says that when he spoke to Greeks, he confronted their culture's idol of speculation and philosophy with the 'foolishness' of the cross, and then presented Christ's salvation as true wisdom. However, when he spoke to Jews he confronted their culture's idol of power and accomplishment with the 'weakness' of the cross, and then presented the gospel as true power. In both cases, Paul was offering Christ's salvation in a way the culture could relate to (offering true power to the Jew and true wisdom to the Greek) and which connected to 'baseline' cultural narratives. And yet, at the same time, it confronted each culture's central idolatry (calling Jews to repent of works-righteousness and Greeks of intellectual hubris) with the meaning of the cross. Here we see, then, Paul's gospel presentations were different to Bible-believing people who thought they would be justified by works on judgment day, and to pagans. These two approaches of Paul, alluded to in Galatians 2 and 1 Corinthians 1 can be discerned in his speeches in the book of Acts.

4. A MAP FOR PRACTICAL CONTEXTUALISATION.

a. First, contextualisation is a matter of order.
   1. There are those doctrines that are logically more basic than others. There's no use pressing a person to believe that Jesus will return to judge the world if he or she doesn't believe in his deity. There's no use teaching a person homosexuality is a sin if he or she doesn't already believe in an authoritative Scripture. In order to secure belief in the dependent doctrines, you have stress and get agreement on the more basic ones.
   2. In all cultures there is some overlap between the values of the culture and Christianity. Some Christian doctrines will make more sense (call them A-doctrines) while others will be offensive (call them B-doctrines.) This is implied by the striking verse 1 Peter 2:12, which assumes that the world will in some respects praise and admire Christian faith and practice and yet in other respects hate and persecute it. For example, in some cultures the idea of human sinfulness is palatable while Christian concepts of free grace and forgiveness are seen as weakness or plain injustice. In western cultures, the reverse is true – grace and forgiveness sounds great but the very idea of sin and judgment is loathsome. **Example**: I once spoke to a missionary who used to work among prostitutes in Korea. He found that the women in that culture, they could understand the concept of sin and judgment, but they simply could not grasp the idea of God's grace extended to them. Their self-hatred and shame was too great. Finally, the missionary came upon the idea of talking to non-Christian prostitutes about predestination right up front. He told them about a God who simply chose some people out of the human race to save, simply because it was his sovereign will to do so. Therefore, those who were chosen were saved because of his royal will, not because of the quality of their lives. While the idea of God's sovereign choosing is offensive to people in a democratic, individualistic western cultures, it made sense to Asian women. It did not put them off – it made sense to them. That belief, then, opened up the possibility of salvation by grace. They asked, 'how can I know if I am chosen?' He answered that, if as they heard the gospel and wanted to accept and believe it, that was a sign that the Holy Spirit was working on their heart and that God was seeking them. Sovereignty/predestination was an A-doctrine with them, though it is a B-doctrine in the US; the doctrine of free grace was B-doctrine with them, but is an A-doctrine here. **Conclusion**: In general, in any effective communication, you should lead with the more comprehensible doctrines, securing assent there first. Then you should use their agreement on those truths to push them toward the others, the more difficult or offensive doctrines. Show them it is inconsistent to hold the first ones without being open to the others.
   3. How do you do this? Don't we have to preach the whole counsel of God? Do you avoid Biblical truths that are unpalatable and only stress the ones that 'make sense in the culture'? No. You must preach on all the Biblical truths as you preach through the Bible. But knowing your culture, you surround B-doctrines always with A-doctrines.

b. Second, contextualisation is a matter of **emphasis**.
   1. The Bible has many images and ways to talk about sin, many ways to talk about the meaning of the cross, many ways to talk about the nature of the church, the Christian community. The inter-canonical themes that unite the Bible are richly diverse: Exile and homecoming, temple and sacrifice, covenant and faithfulness, kingdom and

kingship, and so on. When we seek to communicate the gospel to a particular culture, we will find that some of the themes resonate deeply, they connect to baseline cultural narratives, hopes, aspirations, and problems. Though, again, we must preach the whole counsel of God, we should emphasise the Biblical themes that connect so well.

2. Example: Probably the typical way that Christians define sin is to say that it is breaking God's law. Properly explained, of course, that can be a good and sufficient definition. The law of God includes both sins of omission and of commission, and it includes the attitudes of the heart. However, there are a couple of reasons that this shouldn't be the only way to describe sin to postmodern listeners. When most listeners today hear that sin is 'breaking God's law' all the emphasis in their minds falls on the negative (sins of commission) and on the external (behaviours rather than attitudes.) Also, so many listeners are relativists, and the moment you say, 'Sin is breaking God's moral standards,' they will retort, 'Well, who is to say whose moral standards are right? Everyone has different ones! What makes Christians think that theirs is the only right set of moral standards?' Instead, begin by defining sin in another, thoroughly Biblical way – as building your identity – your self-worth and happiness – on anything more than God. That is, define sin as idolatry. That puts the emphasis not as much on 'doing bad things' but on 'making good things into ultimate things.' Instead of telling listeners they are sinners because they are sleeping with their girlfriends or boyfriends, tell them they are sinning because they are looking to their careers and romances to save them, to give them everything that they should be looking for from God. Tell them this idolatry leads to drivenness, addictions, severe anxiety, obsessiveness, envy of others, and resentment.

   I have found that when you describe their lives in terms of idolatry, postmodern people do not give much resistance. They are convicted, pretty quickly admitting (sheepishly) that this is what they are doing. This is adapting the message of sin to their cultural sensibilities, but it in no way is 'telling them what they want to hear.' It convicts them. I have also found that this makes sin more personal. Making an idol out of something means giving it the love you should be giving your Creator and Sustainer. To depict sin as not only a violation of law but also of love is more compelling. Of course a complete description of sin and grace includes recognition of our rebellion against the authority of God's law. But I've found that if people become convicted about their sin as idolatry and mis-directed love, it is easier to show them that one of the effects of sin is to put them into denial about their hostility to God. In some ways, idolatry is like addiction writ large. We are snared by our spiritual idols just like people are snared by drink and drugs. We live in denial of how much we are rebelling against and violating God's rule just like addicts live in denial of how much they are trampling on their families and loved ones. The 'addiction' model of denial is also a great way to convey the idea of spiritual blindness to post-modern people. Is this still the basic Pauline gospel of 'justification by faith alone'? It is. Luther (in his Larger Catechism) shows that idolatry (violating the first commandment) is the very same thing as trusting something besides Jesus for your justification. Idolatry, then, is always a failure to accept salvation by grace alone through faith in Christ alone. Any sermon that calls for repentance from idols and offers freedom through Christ must also call people to move from justification-by-works to justification-by-faith alone.

3. In the end, these are matters of emphasis, not exclusion. If we expound the Bible, we will certainly be talking about sin as law-breaking and sin as idolatry too. If you are preaching expositionally, different passages will convey different forms and expressions of the one gospel. Follow the lead of the texts and vary the form, and then your people will hear all the points. Won't this confuse people? No, it will stretch them. When one group of listeners – say the 'post-modern' – hears a penetrating presentation of sin as idolatry, it opens them up to the concept of sin as grieving and offending God. Sin as a personal affront to a perfect, holy God begins to make more sense, and when they hear this presented in another gospel form, it has credibility. When more liberal people hear about the kingdom of God for the restoration of the world, it opens them up to Christ's kingship demanding obedience from them in their personal lives. In short, every gospel form, once it hits home in the hearts of its 'target' audience, opens them to the other points of the gospel made more vividly in other forms.

c. Third, contextualisation follows an **enter-challenge-re-establish approach.**
   1. **Entering the frame of reference** means choosing parts of the belief system of the person that (accidentally or providentially) are similar to the Christian world-view. Do your best to affirm it with integrity. Articulate it better then they can. (For example, talk to secular kids about sex ethics showing Bible's lack of prudishness, open discussion of the magnificence of sexuality. Then challenge their flippancy and licentiousness. [This doesn't mean that their lack of prudishness was based on anything good!] But don't take this

approach with Muslims or Hindus! With them talk of the sanctity of sex.) Perhaps the most basic way to gain credibility is through articulating the aspirations, hopes, and anxieties of the listeners that arise from these core beliefs. Since all of these will find fulfilment in Christ, be very vivid it expressing them. Quote references that convey them well. Provide illustrations and make it personal.

2. **Challenging the frame of reference** means showing them their inconsistency. So for example, the average college student is not an atheist, but a rather squishy agnostic. They don't think people can know if there is a God but they are vehement that it is wrong to oppress and starve the poor. But if you show them that it is very hard to demand that others respect human rights if there is no God and we just evolved through the strong eating the weak, you now have created a crisis for them. You are challenging their framework. Or another example. A listener may believe strongly in a God of love but believes that the Bible probably has a lot of errors in it and is not totally trustworthy. But, you can reason, if you don't have an authoritative Bible through which God can contradict you, how can you have a real, personal love relationship with God? How could he ever tell you something you don't want to hear?
3. **Re-establishing equilibrium with a new framework** means showing them how what they are looking for can only be found in Christ. Show them that the plot-lines of their aspirations and hopes and troubles can only find a resolution, a 'happy ending' in Christ.

CASE #1 TEACHING ON THE DOCTRINE OF JUDGMENT

Arthur Miller After the Fall

For years I looked at life like a case at law. It was a series of proofs. When you are young, you prove how brave you are, or smart; then, what a good lover you are. Later you prove what a good father or husband you are. Finally, prove how wise, or powerful or whatever. But underlying it all, I see now, there was a presumption. That one moved… on an upward path toward some elevation where. I don't know what. I would be justified or condemned – a verdict anyway. I think that my disaster really began when I looked up one day… and the bench was empty! No judge in sight. And all that remained was the endless argument with oneself… this pointless litigation of existence before an empty bench… Which of course, is another way of saying – despair.

Entry Point: Meaning in Life 1) Citing Arthur Miller itself is and entry point. 2) Miller shows that we all need to believe in some kind of external standard in order to have meaning in life. We are working so hard – but for what? Unless there is a judge, some objective moral standards, there can be no sense of moving 'upward' or forward. **Challenging Point**: The 'empty bench' is the secular view of the world. But to say that 'everything is relative' is to be shut up to your own endless internal argument, because you will never be able to stop striving. **Sum**: If your premise (that the universe's bench is empty) leads you to a conclusion you know isn't true (that there is no meaning in life, that there is no reason to go on) – why not change your premise?

Miroslav Volf, Exclusion and Embrace

My thesis is that the practice of non-violence requires a belief in divine vengeance… My thesis will be unpopular w/ many in the West.… But imagine speaking to people (as I have) whose cities and villages have been first plundered, then burned, and levelled to the ground, whose daughters and sisters have been raped, whose fathers and brothers have had their throats slit…Your point to them – we should not retaliate? Why not? I say – the only means of prohibiting violence by us is to insist that violence is only legitimate when it comes from god… Violence thrives today, secretly nourished by the belief that god refuses to take the sword… It takes the quiet of a suburb for the birth of the thesis that human nonviolence is a result of a God who refuses to judge. In a scorched land – soaked in the blood of the innocent, the idea will invariably die, like other pleasant captivities of the liberal mind… if God were NOT angry at injustice and deception and did NOT make a final end of violence, that God would not be worthy of our worship.

Entry Point: Peacemaking; suffering of the oppressed. 1) One of our very biggest problems today is how to get people who deeply differ to live together in peace – how to stop the endless cycles of vengeance and violence. 2) Most secular people believe that religion only makes the cycles of violence worse. It would be better for peace if more people were religious skeptical like most Western intellectuals are. **Challenging Point**: 1) This is a naive view, held by people who themselves have not suffered violence. 2) If I am violated, only a deep belief in a God of justice will enable me to refrain from picking up the sword and rendering my own justice. 3) The only way to non-violence is belief in a God of judgment and vengeance!

CASE #2 – A LAW STUDENT ON A BUS

From Becky Pippert's Out of the Salt-Shaker.

Becky meets LS on the bus and introduces the subject of heroes.

LS: 'I guess Karl Marx is my hero.' [Editor's note: Remember, this was 1979!]

BP: 'What makes him your hero?'

LS: 'I think his ideas were great – they haven't always been carried out rightly.'

BP: 'But what exactly is so great about his ideas?'

LS: 'He's my hero because of his passionate regard for the oppressed'

BP: 'I agree with that concern, but… I know Marx holds

no belief in God.'

LS: 'Yes… he sees the universe as godless, and we have meaning only in a corporate sense of class. We are not significant as individuals.'

BP: 'Yet you admire his regard for the oppressed even though they are ultimately insignificant. It seems strange to value people so highly when they are random products of a universe. Why not manipulate them as you please?'

LS: 'I couldn't do that… I guess if my natural response is to feel [individuals] are significant then I need a philosophic system that says the same things…. But I believe we are basically good. If we could just live in a classless society, we would be free of the things that weigh us down….

BP: 'Listen, I know a guy who is one of the worst racists… if he lived with you for 50 years in your classless society, he would still think 'nigger'. How can Marx wipe out the ugliness and hatred of a bigot?'

LS: [Eyes glaring] 'We've been trying to change that for centuries… And all the rules and laws in the world can't… make you love me.'

BP: 'Look, you tell me you know individuals are significant, and you need a system that says so. Now you're saying that the real evil comes from within us. For external rules or laws can curb but cannot transform behaviour. So you need a system that regards evil as internal and a solution that transforms radically not curbs superficially. Right?… Well, that's the very kind of system I've found.'

LS: 'Hey, what kind of revolution are you into?'

(Pippert) 'When I told her I followed Jesus, I think I had better not quote her exact words of response! But after she recovered from her shock she asked me how I knew it was true. For the rest of our trip she asked me to defend Christianity. She listened intently, and when we arrived she said, 'I'd like to get together again… When I went home this weekend my younger sister came to see me, too. Then she told me she'd become a Christian. I told her it was anti-intellectual and unsubstantiated. In a furore I packed my bags, walked out saying I never wanted to discuss it again. And here I got on a bus and sat down next to you.' We do indeed worship the Hound of Heaven.'[4]

B. Analysis. All of life has a religious character. Everyone has implicit religious/faith commitments. Their ways of decision-making, their making moral choices, setting priorities, solving problems – all are based on values which are embraced by faith. An important part of sharing our faith in Christ is the ability to reveal these assumptions for what they are – religious beliefs and doctrines.

In this reading, Becky Pippert does a great job of showing the law student her tacit 'belief positions.' First, she draws out the student's main 'theme of relevance' – her main hope and motivation in life, a passion for justice for the oppressed. Second, she brings out that the law student is also secular – skeptical about the existence of God. Then, with the question: 'if we are just products of chance cosmic forces and therefore insignificant – why not exploit people?' Becky reveals that the student's naturalistic beliefs about the universe really can't support her passion for justice. The student falls back on a very general belief that individual human beings basically have a good nature, but Becky questions that by reference to how deep-seated racism is in the human heart. Finally, Becky presents Jesus as a victim of injustice who came to do something about it.

We learn here three basic steps in sharing our faith:

First, uncover 'belief positions' and 'themes of relevance' (Enter the framework) We can do this by asking the questions: **What is really wrong with the world? with people? with society?** ('What I think is basically wrong with people… What I think is the reason most people are unhappy…') **What will put it right?** 'I think that the way to determine right and wrong is…' 'I think what would ultimately fulfill me…')

Second, show tension between their theme and their belief. (Challenge the framework)
The fundamental way to arouse interest in the gospel is to show a person a tension between their themes of relevance (which reveals their primal understanding that there is a God) and their belief position (which expresses their conscious denial of the Biblical God.)

Third, relate a brief presentation of the gospel to their theme. (Re-establish equilibrium)
Once you have pointed out some tension between the person's concern or conviction and his or her belief position, make a brief presentation of the gospel in such a way that shows how it addresses the person's 'theme'.

Final note: You will discover two basic kinds of non-believers – those who subscribe to the basic beliefs of the Christian faith, but have not understood or 'grasped' the gospel. They are trying to save themselves by being good. These people are not very secular, and generally you can simply demonstrate the case for relevance with a personal testimony, and go immediately to the full content of the gospel (there is seldom a need to make a case for credibility). But in NYC, most people will be more secular, and will reject most or all basic Christian doctrines. Therefore you need to identify their belief position, and make the case for relevance.

[4] The is adapted from account of a conversation between Becky Pippert (BP) with a black female law student (LS) on a bus in Salem, Oregon. (in Out of the Salt Shaker, IVP, 1979, p.160ff.)

E. Notes on Redeemer's Contextualisation to the Centre City

SPIRITUAL PROFILE OF MANHATTANITES:

- Multi-ethnic vs. just Anglo/N.European. A real love of diversity.
- A disdain for niceness, courtesy, modesty.
- Mixture of values from rich and the poor (hip-hop, opera) but not from middle class (pop).
- Ironic vs. sentimental: cynicism, de-bunking. disdain for the obvious in art or communication.
- Suspicious vs. trusting: ostensibly no authorities, hatred of 'spin' and even polish.
- 'Transgressive' to traditional values and whoever is in power. Therefore political incorrectness, blue collar racist remarks are now chic among the hipsters. (To consider yourself a sinner is to transgress the old essentialist standards, so the gospel now transgresses the idea of transgression.
- Extremely moral in transgressive way for rights of oppressed (though inconsistent).
  - ⇒ Expert culture. Expectations of quality in everything. Intelligence and sophistication in communication style. Irony vs. 'preciousness'; Authenticity vs. earnestness.
  - ⇒ Living in career. Obsessed with work and/or career. People do not work to live, but they live in order to work. People come here to 'make it.'
  - ⇒ Meritocracy. Quality will be as important as relationships. E.g. Poor music by a radiant believer will not be acceptable. It excludes, spiritually.
  - ⇒ Sexually active. Not prudish, very frank.
  - ⇒ Freedom/privacy idolatry.
  - ⇒ Less linear/rational than former generations.
  - ⇒ Social concern.
  - ⇒ Non-hierarchical.

In NYC, the 'post-modern' profile above is not only a characteristic for people under 30. New York has had radically secular people here for many decades. In fact, many of the originators of post-structuralism live here. So you can't assume that all the radically secular, post-modern people in NYC are young. If your church wants to reach the post-moderns in NYC, you cannot just exclusively use the music and art and sensibility of the younger generation, as you can do in Atlanta, for example.

Question for every church in Manhattan – will you seek the real New Yorkers (the majority) or will you run your church on the 'travellers' – people from the mid-west and south who have a traditional world-view and who are only here for a couple years, 'passing through'? Do we aim for the cultural 'heart' of NYC or do we aim for the temporary outsiders from the more traditional values/middle class who are coming through the city.

1. The City-centre is a **culture of expertise**. People who live in city centres are usually highly skilled and highly educated. Ministry implications:
   - Artistic quality is very important. Amateurish art and music will not go over well, especially with the high percentage of centre-city residents who are themselves artists. And the postmodern 'turn' puts more emphasis on the visual, on graphics, on embodiment. Excellence in art is more 'inclusive' to non-believers and new people. Insiders appreciate mediocre music from a friend, but gifted, excellent music benefits and lifts up the hearts of all present.
   - Communication (especially preaching) needs to be very intelligent and skillful. a) Intelligent. There is a surprising amount of anti-intellectualism within the evangelical world. People have noticed for years that campus fellowships at Ivy League schools are very anti-intellectual and pietistic. In general, however, this will not reach the people who tend to 'make it' and stay put in city-centres. b) Skillful. Professionals are used to careful, brief, vivid, and clear oral communication. Also, because of the drift of the culture away from rationality toward subjectivism there is ability to listen to long, rambling, dry lectures.
   - Tenure and relationship is, in general, not as important to professionals as productivity and quality. They live in a more 'meritocratic' environment, and this effects how people evaluate ministry. Church ministers and staff will be held to a higher standard of performance by parishioners and constituents.
   - Volunteerism is complicated. Professionals are stressed and busy. Building a church on volunteers (which must be done) takes greater skill. You need far more volunteers in centre city churches for the same number of tasks (each volunteer has less time to give) and volunteer coordinators must be extremely good at positive motivation. Guilt and appeals to commitment do not work.

2. City-centre people are **living in their career**. Many people work in order to come home and have a life. But city-centre people live for their work, rather than working in order to live. It is also so expensive to live in city-centres that most have to work hard to make enough money to stay there. Ministry implications: You can't just disciple people on how to be Christians in their private lives (e.g. prayer, witnessing, Bible study.) Centre-city people don't have much in the way of a 'private life.' If you are in finance or art or acting or medicine your vocation dominates your life and your time. Discipleship must include how to be distinctively Christian within your job, including: a) how to handle the peculiar temptations and ethical quandaries, b) how to produce work in one's field from a distinctly Christian world-view, c) how to help other Christians in your field also do their work excellently and influence the culture.

3. City-centre people are **very sexually active** and believe their sexuality is completely private – their business

alone. Ministry implications: There must be a lack of prudishness about sex yet great and strong teaching/ emphasis on the Christian understanding of sex designed for life-time commitment and community-building, not personal gratification. The area of sex and gender is (currently) politically explosive and it is extremely important for teaching in this area to be smart, sensitive, irenic, and nuanced ways, carefully co -opting existing cultural narratives (about freedom, identity, and community) yet upholding the Biblical view of things. Even strong Christians in city-centres will be under great temptation to be sexually active in various ways that can undermine or destroy their spiritual effectiveness. Sexual issues are so prominent in people's lives that discipling, pastoral care, and spiritual direction will constantly have to deal with them.

4. City-centre people have **consumer identities**. Traditional culture had 'thick' communities in which you got identity through one's role in the family and society. Modern and post-modern culture thins out community (through mobility), and 'frees' individuals to create their own identity and achieve their own significance. This leaves us vulnerable to consumerism – we get a sense of both status and distinctiveness by things we purchase. Consumer-identities turn everything (including church) into a commodity that meets your needs. Ministry Implications:

- First, this means centre-city people will spend most of their time achieving identity in work and accruing wealth. Idolatries of money, career, and status are far more dominating than they were in more traditional cultures, where the highest importance was given to being respected in loved in your community and family. This means that centre-city people will feel they have no time for ministry, for growth in discipleship, and they will make life-decisions based on what is best for career advancement rather than on what is best for spiritual flourishing. This must be addressed constantly in discipleship and preaching – with the knowledge that professionals are caught to a great degree in a cultural/social system that makes it almost impossible to have a balanced life and still keep one's job. Gentle, sympathetic challenges must be made.
- Second, this means professionals tend to 'consume' church programs – picking and choosing the ones that they feel help them along the way. They do this instead of identifying with the church community as a whole, allowing others to play a role in their decision-making, being accountable for holiness and lifestyle. Centre-city churches need strong and clear teaching on the importance of community and the implications of individualism.

5. City-centre people are the most **rootless** people (geographically, socially, historically) in the world. (See Pico Iyer's 'Nowhereians.') Modern capitalism uproots people from geography in the quest for work and money. The modern world-view has disdained the past and tended to make people also feel historically rootless. Ministry implications:

- Historic roots: Both the traditional and post-modern are extremely interested in the historic roots of the church. Liturgical renewal and eclectic music/art (opera and Mozart and jazz and gospel) is better than the 'contemporary worship' for providing those roots.
- Geographic roots: The centre-city church recognises the critical importance of 1) high quality and accessible small groups and 2) the infra-structure to support Christians living long-term in centre cities (e.g. schools, community centres, credit unions, etc.)

6. City-centre people are **pragmatic rather than rational** or 'linear' in thinking. Modernity elevated action over contemplation while post-modernity created enormous skepticism about reasoning and 'truth.' Together they create a culture in which people believe 'it's true if it works for me' rather than 'it works for me because it's true.' Ministry implications:

- We have to adapt to this in some respects. 1) Testimonies of changed lives becomes very important. Non-believers will often find the personal testimony more compelling than the declarative sermon. 2) We need to teach the Bible narratively. Yes, in general, expounding narrative sections of the Scripture is more immediately gripping to centre-city people than the explanation of the epistles. 3) We need to create great community – because that is (according to Jesus in John 17) a crucial 'apologetic'. 4) We need to use varieties of art to embody our message, not just give talks containing long strings of logic.
- However, we also must challenge pragmatism 'all the way down.' If people believe in Christ because it 'works' for them, they have fitted Christ to their individualistic world-view rather than fitting their world-view to Christ. We must keep up the drumbeat that the gospel is not true because it is relevant – it is only relevant because it is true, and it can only become relevant and life-changing if it is embraced as true, whether it seems to be meeting your needs at the moment or not.

7. City-centre people are ironic **and suspicious of authority and institutions** (especially religious ones.) Ministry implications:

- Leadership must take great pains to be open, not to hide information or be 'political.' Worship leading and music can't be 'bathetic', slurpy, and manipulative. Don't use 'we-them' language. Don't be disrespectful to doubters. Communication tone must be free from evangelical tribal jargon. Humour is extremely important (but use gentle, humble irony – not broad humour nor cutting humour.)
- Paradoxically, while 'excellence' and intelligence is important (see above,) nevertheless, sophisticated centre-city younger professionals are also very wary of

spin, polish, and hype. They are looking for authenticity. They have been battered by advertising all their lives and tend to be cynical about it. Overly slick, polished, and glossy presentations are suspect. Sentimentality, earnestness, 'niceness' seems phony and manipulative. There is disdain for the obvious in art and communication.

- In this 'culture of suspicion' it is crucial to use the gospel's own critique of religiosity, pretence, and moralistic sham.
  - ⇒ Admit how faith and religion can be used to oppress people and show that the gospel is the strongest possible way to deconstruct 'religion.' In other words, join the scepticism about religion. This is crucial for reaching centre city people.
  - ⇒ But also, at the same time, challenge relentless cynicism. Deconstruct deconstruction, show that endless doubting is very self-justifying and arrogant, ultimately. Show that self-righteousness about self-righteousness is perhaps the worst kind. Show that deep relativism is really a form of intolerance. (See The Reason for God, chapter 1.) As C.S.Lewis says, in The Abolition of Man

    'You cannot go on seeing through things for ever. The whole point of seeing through something is to see something through it... If you see through everything, then everything is transparent. But a wholly transparent world is an invisible world. To see through all things is the same as not to see.'

8. City-centre culture is very **multi-ethnic and international**, much more so than suburbs or even than inner city areas. Ministry implications:

- It is crucial for centre-city churches to be as deliberately multi-ethnic as possible and to promote and celebrate diversity-unity in Christ as evidence of the gospel's power. Stress the gospel's resources for embracing the 'Other.' The more dominant cultural groups must humble themselves and 'stretch' to make room for those less well represented.
- Great care must be taken not to allow the church to be too beholden to one political party or political agenda – or cultural diversity will be hard to maintain. (And evangelism will be hard to do!) It is crucial to show that, just as common Christian faith is more important than our race, so it is more important than political sympathies. Increasingly, politics is 'Nietzsche an' – opponents are not engaged for the sake of persuasion, but are ridiculed, demonised, caricatured, and mocked, for the sake of marginalising. Politics is now highly moralistic – the opposing party is not just wrong but evil or made up of culpable fools. If the world sets the agenda for people inside the church, so Christians see political affiliations in the same moralistic terms, then each church will a) only be able to evangelise people of one affiliation, and b) will have allowed the church to be captured by culture.
- Great effort should be made to have the various ethnic groups 'see themselves' in the leadership of the church. In other words, if you want a multi-ethnic church, you must work to have a multi-ethnic staff.

9. City-centre people **tend to come to faith through process, relationships, and mini-decisions**. They will want to try Christianity on, see how it fits their problems and how it fleshes out in real life. In general the 'presentation' of the gospel to secular people will require multiple exposures and a long process. To establish relevance, explode stereotypes, field intellectual objections, and explain the basics of the faith will ordinarily require a process, not a single communication event. 'Sudden conversions' are really the results of preparation. In missional churches, the preacher week in and week out deals winsomely and intelligently with the problems of non-believers. On the other hand, when the preacher speaks more to Christians, the non-Christians present come to see how Christianity 'works'. The process that must be allowed is:

- **Awareness**. 'This is it.' Clearing the ground of stereotypes. Distinguishing the gospel from legalism or liberalism. Distinguishing core from peripheral. Awareness decisions:
  - She's OK; she's very cheerful and accepting.
  - She's religious, but surprisingly open-minded.
  - You can be a Christian and be intelligent!
  - The Bible isn't so hard to understand after all.
  - A lot of things the Bible says really fit me.
  - I see the difference between Christianity and just being moral.
- **Relevance**. 'I need it.' Showing the slavery of both religion and irreligion. Showing the transforming power, how the gospel 'works'. Relevance decisions:
  - There must be some advantages to being a firm Christian.
  - An awful lot of very normal people really like this church!
  - It would be nice if I could believe like she does, it would help.
  - Jesus seems to be the key: I wonder who he was.
- **Credibility**. 'I need it because it's true.' Reversing the modern view that it-is-true-if-I-need-it. Must see the reasonableness or no endurance later. Credibility decisions:
  - I see the Bible is historically reliable.
  - You really can't use science to disprove the supernatural.
  - There really were eyewitnesses to the resurrection.
  - Jesus really is God.
  - I see now why Jesus had to die – it is the only way.
- **Commitment**. 'I take it.' Sometimes this is the point of real conversion. Sometimes it happened before, sometimes it happens later. Commitment decisions:
  - I am a sinner.
  - I need a Savior.

Though there are lots of costs, I really must do what He says.
I will believe in him and live for him.

- **Trial**. 'I see what it would be like.' In group life, in service ministries, they try Christianity on, often talking like Christians or defending it.
- **Reinforcement**. 'Now I get it.' Typically, a period of follow up is the place where the penny drops and the gospel gets clear. Shorter if trial longer.

10. City-centre people are deeply **concerned for justice and the poor**. At least in principle! Most centre-city people because of their international connection and education are less parochial and have a theoretical commitment to helping the poor, but their jobs and consumer identities prevent them from much concrete action on behalf of others. Ministry implications:

- Show that the gospel is the faith of choice for the poor of the world. They don't embrace secularism, but Jesus!
- Show the resources of Christianity for having hope in the future. At the end of the Bible we don't see individuals being taken out of the world into heaven but heaven coming down to renew the world and cleanse if of evil, disease, injustice, death.
- Your church cannot simply do the typical 'charity' and volunteer programs. The church has to ask how it is going to really make a difference in its city for the poor. Most important of all – is to have an extremely positive view of your city. Tell people the purpose of your ministry is not simply to create a great church but a great city. The church is for the common good of the whole city (Jer 29:4ff.)

F. Preaching and Worship in a Missional Church

Since there will be a whole talk and paper devoted to Gospel preaching, I'll offer only these insights.

1. Using the 'Three ways to live' to communicate the gospel.

One of the most important ways to get a hearing from post -modern people and to wake up nominal or sleepy Christians is to communicate the gospel as a 'third' distinct way from both irreligion and religion. Religion is 'if I obey I will be accepted.' Irreligion is 'I don't really have to obey anyone but myself.' The gospel is 'since I am accepted in Christ, I will obey.' It is crucial to distinguish all three from one another for your hearers. Why?

First, many professed Christians aren't believers – they are pure 'elder brothers' (Luke 15:11ff.) and only making this distinction can convert them. Second, many genuine Christians are elderbrotherish – angry, mechanical, superior, insecure – and only making this distinction can renew them. Third, modern and post-modern people have either been raised in or near churches that were heavily 'religious' – either in a conservative, moralistic way or in a liberal, 'do-gooder' way. When they rejected religion and its fruits they were sure they had rejected Christianity. Unless you show them that you are offering them something different they won't stay to listen to you.

The only way to get legalists to understand their error is to 'deconstruct' antinomianism with the gospel. And the only way to get anti-nomians to understand their error is to 'deconstruct' legalism with the gospel. Modern and post-modern people have seen how self-righteous religious people are. As we have seen, religious people who don't understand the gospel have to bolster their own sense of worthiness by convincing themselves they are better than other people. This leads them to exclude and condemn others. The majority of modern and post-modern people in NYC who are hostile to Christianity don't know any other kinds of churches. Only if you show them there's a difference – that what they rejected isn't real Christianity – only then will they even begin to think and listen again and give it 'one more look'.

If Luther is right (and he is!) that 'religion' is the default mode of the human heart, then when non-believers hear you calling them to follow Christ they will automatically believe you are calling them into the 'elder brother' moralistic approach to God. It doesn't matter if you use Biblical language such as 'receive Christ and you will be adopted into his family' (John 1:12ff) They will think you are calling them to try hard to live according to Christ's example. Unless you are extremely clear and are constantly contrasting religion with the gospel – your hearers will believe you are calling them to 'get religion'.

In a local church, both a ministry that is loose about doctrine and winks at disobedience and sin and a ministry in which there is scolding and 'tightness' – lack any kind of spiritual power, authority, and joy that brings people into life change. They are both the same thing because they both support people in self-salvation. The only way into a ministry that sees people's lives change, that brings a joy and power and electricity without authoritarianism – is a preaching of the gospel that deconstructs both legalism and leniency equally.

Some claim that to constantly be striking a 'note of grace, grace, grace' in our sermons is not helpful in our culture today. The objection goes like this: 'Surely Phariseeism and moralism is not a problem in our culture today. Rather, our problem is license and antinomianism. People lack a sense of right or wrong. It is 'carrying coal to Newcastle' to talk about grace all the time to postmodern people. But I don't believe that is the case. Unless you point to the 'good news' of grace the people won't even be able to bear the 'bad news' of God's judgment. Also, as noted, unless you critique moralism, many irreligious people won't know the difference between moralism and what you are offering.

2. Evangelistic Worship And Preaching

- **Evangelistic worship**. God commanded Israel to invite the nations to join in declaring his glory. Zion is to be the centre of world-winning worship (Isaiah 2:2-4; 56:6-8). In Acts 2 and I Cor. 14:23ff we see non-believers attracted and disturbed by worship. We learn 1) non-believers are expected in worship, 2) non-believers must find worship challenging and comprehensible, not comfortable. Specifics: a) Keep quality of speaking and music very high – which is inclusive, b) Use noble simplicity of language (not sentimental, austere, archaic, or colloquial), c) Keep emotion and sentimentality under control. At this point the average educated non-Christian feels excluded by intense emotion in the service. d) Solve people's problems with the gospel (see below.)
- **Preaching to the whole neighbourhood, not just the people in the seats**. Preaching is done as if the whole community was listening in – including the kinds of non-Christians who live around the church. If you preach as if non-Christians from the community were there (even if they aren't!), it will not long before they are brought. Why? In most (even thriving) churches, the whole service usually assumes: 1) a lot of Biblical knowledge, 2) a 'we-them' mentality (we Christians vs. the big, bad world), 3) much evangelical terminology. Thus most Christians, even when they are very edified in church, know intuitively that their non-Christian friends would not appreciate the service. What you want is for a Christian to come to your church and say, 'oh! I wish my non-Christian friend could see (or hear) this!' If this is forgotten, soon even a growing church will be filled with Christians who commute in from various towns and communities far and wide rather than filling up with Christians and seekers from your church's immediate neighbourhoods.
- **Combining believers and non-believers in worship**. There is a premise in much modern church-growth literature to the effect that you can't minister to Christians and non-Christians effectively in the same service. If this is the case, then a church has to either settle for being an outward facing, aggressively evangelistic church or an heavy discipling, teaching church. The evangelistic churches stress messages in their services that appeal to non-Christians but bore the Christians. The teaching churches stress the messages in their services that appeal to Christians but confuse, bore, or offend non-Christians. Some churches using the Willow model often try to do no spiritual formation (preaching to Christians) in the same services where they evangelise non-Christians. But this approach continues to have a pretty severe follow-up problem. Many seekers stay in the seeker services long term, never getting fed stronger meat. (And since the majority of attenders at the seeker services are usually Christians, the believers get stuck in elementary Christianity as well.)

But it is impossible to combine Christians and non-Christians in a major way unless the preacher and leaders understand that the gospel is not just the way people are justified, but also the way they are sanctified. The typical approach to the gospel is to see it is the 'A-B-C's' part of Christian doctrine only, the minimum truth required to be saved. Then it is understood that we make progress in the Christian life through the application of other (more advanced) Biblical principles. If that is the case, then of course we cannot do both evangelism and spiritual formation at the same time. However, the Reformers, especially Luther, understood that the gospel is not only the way we are saved, but it is always the solution to every problem and the way to advance at every stage in the Christian life. (This is why the first of his 95 Theses were that 'all of life is repentance.')

We live in an increasingly 'post-modern' society. The older modern society rejected revelation as a source of truth, but still honoured reason/science as a source of truth. 'Post-moderns' are more deeply secular and skeptical of any kind of truth at all. I propose that the old 'modern' times were more amenable to the segregation of Christians and non-Christians, but our current situation would be better addressed by having a 'mixed' audience in the services.

In a 'mixed' group, when the preacher speaks somewhat more to non-Christians, the Christians present learn how to share the faith. This is extremely important today. It is becoming increasingly difficult for Christians to just share the gospel without doing apologetics. The old canned quickie training programs cannot prepare a Christian for dealing with the range of intellectual and personal difficulties people have with the Christian faith. They need to hear the preacher week in and week out dealing winsomely and intelligently with the problems of non-believers. This excellent 'training'. On the other hand, when the preacher speaks more to Christians, the non-Christians present come to see how Christianity 'works'. More deeply secular 'po-mo' non-Christians tend to decide on the faith on more pragmatic grounds. They do not examine in a detached intellectual way. This way they get to see how Christianity actually 'works' in a person's life.